

Myth #17: Carson City's Philips, Or is it Phillips Street? by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

For years when you traveled down this old thoroughfare in Carson City's west side historic district, you found that the street signs between King and Washington streets spelled the name Philips or Phillips depending on the intersection. How long the signs had two spellings is a matter of conjecture, although it indicates the street's namesake has long-since been forgotten. So was it Philips or Phillips, and who was the street named after?



After pursuing some diligent research among government records, U.S. decennial census, and city directories, it became clear that Henry Smith and Elizabeth Mary PHILLIPS were among Carson City's earliest pioneers. Shortly after the couple and their four sons arrived in Eagle Valley, Utah Territory, from California in late 1859, they bought up large tracts of land in fledgling Carson City. The sellers included three of Carson City's founders: John J. Musser; Frank M. Proctor; and Proctor's father-in-law, Benjamin F. Green. Before long the enterprising couple involved themselves in dozens of land transactions, among those a substantial deal in September 1860 with attorney William M. Stewart who would serve in Nevada's territorial legislature (1861, 1864) and later as a U.S. Senator for Nevada (1864-73, 1887-1905).

By 1862, Carson City's real estate business was so dynamic with all the mining excitement on the Comstock, that Henry and Elizabeth Phillips laid out the Phillips Addition in the territorial capital's northwest town limits. Among the streets named in the subdivision were Phillips, Elizabeth, and Mountain streets. Henry and Elizabeth soon moved their family into an attractive house in the Phillips Addition on the northwest corner of Caroline and Division streets.

Times were good for awhile, however, by 1867 the Phillips were in financial trouble. Henry G. Blasdel, Nevada's governor, filed a lawsuit against the couple to recover a \$1,000 loan. The Phillips' house and lot served as collateral, and the governor was prepared to foreclose on the property. The couple paid the debt and settled out of court. This action apparently only bought them some time. In the 1868 city directory only Elizabeth, working in real estate, is listed. By 1870, the property was sold and the Phillips family had departed -- the U.S. decennial census does not enumerate them as Carson City residents.

While the pioneer family left the scene for Sacramento--Henry is working there as a life insurance agent--the streets named after them and their house remained. The house at 706 N. Division had many owners; some of them quite distinguished. Thomas Porter Hawley, Nevada Supreme Court Justice (1873-90) and federal judge (1890-1906), bought the Phillips house in 1872 and lived there until the early 1890's. In 1904, Dr. Charles W.R. Von Radeskey moved from the San Francisco area, opened a medical practice in Carson City, and purchased the former Phillips house from area resident Walter Harris. Later, Patrick A. McCarran lived in the residence while serving as Supreme Court Justice (1913-1919). McCarran would go on to serve in the U.S. Senate (1933-1954). By the 1920s, rancher John R. Schulz had acquired the house and his son Raymond was born there in 1925.

In the ensuing years, the house would be sold several times, subdivided into apartments, and allowed to deteriorate. An historical property survey in 1980 produced for Carson City failed to even identify the structure as one of the town's oldest residential properties! Today what is left of the house after substantial demolition has been incorporated into a medical complex that encompasses most of the block. A "Letter to the Editor" writer in the Nevada Appeal, characterized the Phillips/Hawley house as having been "...turned into historic 2x4's."

With the house virtually gone, only Elizabeth and Phillips streets remain as visible reminders of Carson City pioneers Henry and Elizabeth Phillips. Elizabeth died on July 7, 1874 and Henry died on December

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14, 1902. They are buried next to each other in the old Sacramento City Cemetery. Looking at old fire insurance maps and city directories, the misspelling of Phillips Street goes back to at least the early 1900s and is not a product of the modern era.

An article in the December 20, 1997 edition of the *Reno Gazette-Journal* pointed out the spelling inconsistencies on a number of Carson City street signs including Phillips Street. Only days after learning that some of the street signs were misspelled, crews from the city's sign shop removed the incorrect markers and installed new ones.

Today, all the green signs at intersections along the five-block-long Phillips Street are spelled correctly. What a wonderful history-related Christmas gift to Carson City and its residents in setting the record straight.

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